

March 8, 2001

future for their families and our communities. In addition, Tom was a leader in health care reform and helped to pave the way for all children in Delaware to have access to health care.

As the Secretary of the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, Tom helped guide and develop improvements for the Ferris School and Juvenile Justice programs. His efforts to provide better programming and educational facilities for juvenile delinquents at the Ferris School has been seen as a national model that other communities are attempting to emulate. He also established Child Mental Health programs that assist many young members of our community.

Tom Eichler's impact on the State of Delaware has touched many people, and most importantly in a positive manner. I first came to know Tom when he was attempting to change individuals' views on ocean dumping and he assisted me with testimony before Congress. From there he went to work as Regional Administrator for Region III, EPA. In the mid-1980's I asked him to serve in my cabinet where his assistance was outstanding. After my departure he continued to serve Delaware in the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families. He was called upon to serve several Governor's, to assist in difficult situations, and he served the people of Delaware admirably. His ability to take on the toughest jobs, reach consensus and have positive outcomes for our community were unsurpassed.

As he retires from working for the State of Delaware I want to honor and thank him on behalf of the people of Delaware for his commitment to making our state a better place for all of us to live and work.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JAMES H. MALONEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 8, 2001

Mr. MALONEY of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, due to the weather I was unavoidably detained on Tuesday, March 6, 2001, and missed rollcall votes 26 and 27. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye" on rollcall vote 26 and "aye" on rollcall vote 27.

Additionally, I was detained on Wednesday, March 7, 2001, and missed rollcall vote 28. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye" on rollcall vote 28.

ARMY RESERVE OFFICER NOT ALLOWED TO WEAR RELIGIOUS SYMBOL

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 8, 2001

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, Dr. Trilok Singh Puniani is a member of the Army Reserve who is being denied the right to wear the symbol of his religion. Dr. Puniani is a Sikh and is required by his religion to wear his turban. It is one of the five symbols of Sikhism. Dr.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, has written to the President on Dr. Puniani's behalf.

Dr. Puniani joined the Army reserve in 1999. There had been an exemption granted that permitted the wearing of a turban while in uniform and there are three Sikhs who have achieved the rank of Colonel who wear their turbans. However, new regulations adopted in July 1999, just a month before Dr. Puniani joined the Army Reserve, denied this exemption for those who joined the service after 1984.

Mr. Speaker, the turban is not a hat. It is a religious symbol like the cross or the star of David. It should be afforded the same treatment.

One concern about this regulation is that it might discourage Sikhs and other minorities from joining the military services of the United States. Our armed services need manpower. We should not be discouraging anyone from joining. These minority Americans are important to our country and to the Army.

Canada and Britain have significant numbers of Sikhs in their military. They both allow these Sikhs to wear their turbans. Why can't we?

Whatever your religious beliefs, the military should treat you equally. This is about civil rights and equal treatment. We cannot give a preference to any religion, but we also cannot discriminate against any religion. I strongly urge the Secretary of Defense to restore the exemption so that the religious expression of Dr. Puniani and others will be respected.

I insert Dr. Puniani's complaint and Dr. Aulakh's letter to the President into the RECORD.

COUNCIL OF KHALISTAN,
Washington, DC, February 20, 2001.

Hon. GEORGE W. BUSH,
President of the United States,
The White House, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: Today I received by email a letter from Dr. Trilok Singh Puniani, who is a practicing physician and a member of the Army Reserve. He wrote to me about the regulation of July 1999 denying Sikhs who joined the military after 1984 the ability to wear their turbans.

The turban is a symbol of the Sikh religion. A practicing Sikh is symbolized by five symbols, one of which is uncut hair covered by a turban. In view of this, Dr. Puniani writes that "this new regulation will deprive the opportunity of joining the US Armed Forces of many aspiring Sikhs who have tremendous potential to serve the country." I agree with him. This would be a loss for America and for its armed forces.

Today there are over half a million Sikh citizens in the United States. They would be deprived of the opportunity to serve their country, the United States of America.

Not to allow Sikhs in the military to practice their Sikh religion is discriminatory and bad for morale. Sikhs fought valiantly in World Wars I and II along with the Allied forces in Europe and Africa. They suffered heavy casualties. The Sikh soldiers wore their turbans. Belgium erected a special monument to the Sikh forces in Ypres.

The British and Canadian forces encourage Sikhs to maintain their Sikh appearance. I respectfully urge you to follow their lead and order the armed forces of the United States to allow Sikhs to practice their religion. By so doing, you would raise the morale and effectiveness of the armed forces. America al-

lows freedom of religion and the armed forces would be the best place to put it into practice.

Thank you for your attention to this problem. God bless you and God bless America.

Sincerely,

GURMIT SINGH AULAKH,
President.

Enclosure: Email from Dr. Puniani.

[Received by email, February 20, 2001]

Re Denial of Sikh attire in the U.S. Army.

RESPECTED DR. AULAKH, I would like to bring to your attention that I am in the U.S. Army Reserve since Aug. 1999. According to army regulation there was a provision to an exception for religious accommodation to wear turban while in the uniform. However, with new regulation published in July 1999 retroactive as of 1984, the request for religious accommodation will not be entertained, with exception of Sikhs who joined the U.S. Army prior to 1984.

To my knowledge, there are three other turbaned Sikhs in the US Army in the rank of Colonels. I am not sure about their date of commission. Those of us who joined the army after 1984 may have to separate honorably.

My concern is that this new regulation will deprive the opportunity of joining the US Armed Forces of many aspiring Sikhs who have tremendous potential to serve the country. America is the champion of democracy and we are being discriminated. I believe as physicians and in other fields we are a valuable asset to the US Army.

The Sikh soldiers are well respected in the British and Canadian Royal Armed Forces and encouraged to maintain their Sikh appearance. Why this discrimination in the US?

I think that this matter be brought to the attention of the Senators and the Congress in Washington for us Sikhs to be part and parcel of this nation and allowed to serve the country with pride.

I am also writing to my local congressman and the unit commanders of the US Army Reserve.

I am looking forward to seeing you in person when you visit us in Fresno. I will be happy to provide you with more information if needed.

Wish you all the best and a long life.

TRILOK S. PUNIANI,
Fresno, CA.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. XAVIER BECERRA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 8, 2001

Mr. BECERRA. Mr. Speaker, on March 6 and 7, I was unable to cast my votes on rollcall votes: No. 26 on motion to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 724; No. 27 on motion to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 727; No. 28 on approving the journal; No. 29 on agreeing to the resolution H. Res. 79; No. 30 on motion to suspend the rules and agree on H. Con. Res. 31; No. 31 on motion to suspend the rules and pass H.R. 624 as amended; No. 32 on motion to suspend the rules and agree on H. Con. Res. 47; and No. 33 on passage of S.J. Res. 6. Had I been present for the votes, I would have voted "aye" on roll call votes 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, and 32; and "nay" on roll call votes 29, and 33.